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CIA-Backed Thais in Laos Say They Are Regular Army

By D. E. Ronk

Special to The Washington Post

VIENTIANE, Laos, Aug. 8—Thai soldiers serving with the CIA-supported irregular forces in Laos say they are regular army troops of Thailand, asked to accept special assignment in all Thai battalions.

Their assertion contradicts a Senate Foreign Relations

Committee staff report made from outside the regular Thai army last week. The report, prepared by Committee staff members James G. Lowenstein and Richard M. Moose referred to Thai troops in Laos as "irregulars."

Heavily censored in most of its references to Thais serving in Laos, the report said the Thai fighting men "are recruited for service in Laos

Speaking to a reporter, several Thai soldiers said they were asked to accept an assignment in Laos after the advantages of such service were explained. They have the option of refusing, they said.

According to the Lowenstein-Moose report, "the CIA supervises and pays for the training of these irregulars in Thailand and provides their salary, allowances (including death benefits), and operational costs in Laos."

Their units are formed in Thailand with Thai commissioned and non-commissioned officers and are given special training for Laos.

They arrive in Laos aboard CIA-supported Air America planes from Udorn airbase in Northern Thailand. All orders, from the battalion level down, are issued by Thais, the soldiers said. Only at the very top, with Gen. Vang Pao, the Meo commander of Laos Military Region Two, and the CIA's Armee Clandestine, is there interference with the Thai chain of command, they said.

Vang Pao does not command the Thais, they said, but consults with Thai officers and the CIA "case officer" who actually make the decisions.

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The Thai soldiers agree with press reports that there is at least one Thai general in Laos, using the code name Nai Caw. This is the equivalent of John Doe. The Thai troops say he is a lieutenant general.

Code names are frequently used by and for Thai troops in Laos. Reliable sources in Thailand say that until recently all

wounded Thais treated in the U.S. hospital at Udorn Airbase were listed as John Doe One, Two, Three, etc. to hide their national origins.

At present the troops say, there are 10 or 12 Thai battalions in Laos, or about 4,800 men. Two Thai battalions are at Pakse, in southern Laos, and "about ten" in northern Laos, with headquarters at Long Cheng, the soldiers said.

Reliable sources in Bangkok say, moreover, that another Thai artillery battery has either just entered Laos or shortly will, accompanied by an American major. The U.S. officer is to advise them on the operation of unfamiliar equipment, believed to be aiming devices.

Official U.S. sources deny knowledge of such a unit, that an American officer has been given such an assignment, and that a new American officer has arrived or is expected, even on temporary duty.

The Bangkok sources say the officer will be traveling on a civilian passport and in civilian clothing..

A Thai soldier now stationed in Pakse outlined the sequence of events in his assignment to Laos. Returning to Thailand from duty in South Vietnam, he said, he was sent for advance training in Thailand following a 30-day leave. He was told the training was for assignment to Cambodia, he said.

Following the training, he was told his assignment was changed to Laos, but that he could refuse to go and remain in Thailand.

After the pros and cons were explained he decided to accept and became a volunteer.

Following formation of a "special battalion," he was sent to Udorn, then to Long Cheng. At Long Cheng, the unit was engaged in defense of that headquarters. The Thais fought in one "heavy"

battle in a sector call "Skyline" by U.S. personnel.

Shortly before the fall of the Bolovens Plateau in southern Laos to North Vietnamese forces last May the Thai battalion was flown to Ubon Air Base in Thailand then to Pakse, where they were airlifted to the vicinity of Ba Houei Sai, on the Bolovens Plateau.

As a result of the Hanoi offensive, they withdrew to Pakse. The soldiers said they are not deeply involved in the current counter offensive to recapture the Bolovens, though some of them are used as forward air guides, relaying bombing targets from ground to air.

Recent visitors to Pakse say the Thai soldiers are very much in evidence in hotels and bars. They do not wear Thai army markings on their uniforms and the soldiers say they carry no identification, on orders from their officers.

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Thai Combat Troops for Laos Expected to Double by March

By TAMMY ARBUCKLE

Special to The Star

VIENTIANE — Twelve thousand Thai troops will be available for combat in Laos by March 1, high-ranking Lao military sources say. This will more than double the current force of between 5,000 and 6,000 Thai army troops deployed in Laos.

American official sources confirmed that 12,000 Thais will be available to meet the expected dry season offensive by the North Vietnamese early next year, but they said that "all of these Thais will not be in Laos at the same time. Units will be rotated to Thailand for rest and rehabilitation."

The additional troops will come from Thailand's Black Leopard Division which is withdrawing from South Vietnam. Headquarters will be at Kanchanaburi, northwest of Bangkok and many hundreds of miles from Thailand's border.

The Bangkok Post, an English language daily, has quoted government sources as saying the new troops will be used as a guerrilla force within Thailand to counter the Communist insurgency problem in Thailand.

Lao military sources said there would be an announcement telling of the formation of the Thai guerrilla force to fight in Thailand, but that the troops actually are destined to fight in Laos.

Thus American officials handling funds would be able to disburse money to the Thais, although they would be paying for troops in Laos.

The reason for this is that administration officials are trying to get around the congressional ban on the use of Defense Department funds to pay for mercenaries in Laos. As part of this, U.S. government officials here and in Washington describe the Thais as "volunteers" and ethnic Lao from northeast Thailand.

In reality, however, the Thais serving in Laos are regular members of the royal Thai army who volunteered to serve in Laos for extra pay.

Eight Thai soldiers who were interviewed confirmed the arrangement. Three of the soldiers came from Bangkok or its sister city, Thonburi, one was from Nonthaburi and the others were from north or northeast Thailand.

The Thais have their own com-

mand system and have almost nothing to do with the royal Lao army. The only Lao military decision which affects them is by a Lao regional commander who may ask American officials to deploy the Thais in a certain place as part of an over-all Lao army operation.

U.S. administrators have claimed the Thais are part of the royal Lao army, but none of the eight Thais spoken to considered themselves as such. American officials attempting to circumvent the congressional restriction deserve some sympathy, for their problem is a difficult one.

The Thais are essential to the survival of the royal Lao forces against the North Vietnamese. The Lao army is sadly depleted,

with its casualties running at 10 men killed in action a day.

This year the Thais have been involved in most major action in Laos. They fought at Houei Sai on the Bolovens Plateau when it fell. They took part in the Plain of Jars operation, helping the Lao recapture the area. Thai artillerymen are manning firebase Lion on the plain now.

The Thais also took the responsibility for clearing out a new enemy position at Pak Song last week, freeing sufficient Lao troops for a helicopter lift to take Pak Song from the east.

The high Lao casualties at Pak Song (1,262, including 212 killed and 295 missing out of a force of fewer than 3,000) make it likely that Thais will be needed in the southern Laos Bolovens Plateau.

New Raise Voted For Military Pay

By Spencer Rich
Washington Post Staff Writer

The Senate voted yesterday to boost military pay another \$381 million a year and to impose a watered-down limit on U.S. outlays for "the secret war in Laos."

The military pay amendment, offered by Sen. Gordon Allott (R-Colo.), was added to the \$21 billion defense procurement authorization bill by a 65 to 4 vote. Effective Nov. 16, it would boost basic pay at the lowest enlisted and officer grades and is in addi-

tion to \$2.366 billion in raises just approved in the draft extension bill. The extra pay raise may prove unacceptable to the House.

Despite the reported strenuous opposition of Henry A. Kissinger, Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs, the Laos spending limit was added to the procurement bill by a 67 to 11 vote after sponsor Stuart Symington (D-Mo.) and Armed Services Committee Chairman John Stennis (D-Miss.) worked out a compromise softening an earlier Symington proposal.

As approved by the Senate, the Laos provision limits to \$350 million in fiscal 1972 the total of U.S. outlays to Laos for all forms of U.S. military and economic assistance, other than the costs of U.S. bombing and strafing runs over Northern Laos and the Ho Chi Minh Trail.

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Symington's earlier amendment, which was totally unacceptable to the Nixon administration, would have imposed a \$200 million limit and would have included in that figure the costs of bombing in the North.

Although \$350 million is precisely the amount the Nixon administration had anticipated spending in fiscal 1972 for military and economic assistance to Laos — other than for bombing and strafing runs — this is the first time any limit has ever been imposed on enlargement of the war there. The amendment thus establishes the principle of congressional surveillance and it also requires quarterly reports on total expenditures in Laos by the United States. "The principle of establishing some ceiling is more important than the precise figure," said Harold Hughes (D-Iowa).

Kissinger, according to Sen-

ate sources told Stennis in several telephone calls that he opposed any limitation. But Stennis finally agreed with Symington that some form of direct congressional control is needed, and proposed to Symington the following revision: Give the administration the money it wants this year (\$350 million) instead of cutting it to \$200 million, leave outlays for air operations unlimited, but establish the principle of a congressional limit.

In the 67 to 11 vote, Sens. Mike Mansfield (D-Mont.), J.W. Fulbright (D-Ark.), Mark Hatfield (R-Ore.), John Sherman Cooper (R-Ky.) and other critics of the war in Laos where the CIA is financing not only the Lao government but also Thai soldiers hired to fight against the Communists — opposed the revised Symington amendment. They apparently feared that it could be read as assenting to the Laotian operation even while limiting it.

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LIMIT ON LAOS AID VOTED BY SENATE

\$350-Million Ceiling Set in Compromise Amendment

Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, Oct. 4—The Senate voted today to place a \$350-million ceiling on military and economic assistance to Laos.

The ceiling, in an amendment to the military procurement authorization bill, was a compromise version of a proposal made by Senator Stuart Symington of Missouri. As chairman of a Senate Foreign Relations subcommittee, Senator Symington has disclosed that the United States, operating principally through the Central Intelligence Agency, has been supporting the Laotian Government against enemy forces.

Senator Symington had originally proposed a \$200-million ceiling, but as a compromise raised the figure to \$350-million—the amount the Administration recently stated was planned for economic and military assistance in Laos in the current fiscal year. Not included in this total is United States air support for government and C.I.A. supported troops in northern Laos, which is expected to cost \$140-million.

Amendment Wins Easily

The Symington amendment was adopted by a 67-11 vote.

In effect, it would authorize the Administration's planned program in Laos, including C.I.A. support of a paramilitary force of Meo tribesmen and more than 4,000 Thai "volunteers" fighting in Laos. But to Senator Symington, the significance of the amendment was that for the first time it would establish the principle that Congress could impose limits on how much the executive branch could spend in Laos and in turn bring the expenditures out into the open.

In the past, funds for Laos have been concealed in various appropriations bills and only a few members of Congress were aware of what was being spent. In arguing for his amendment, the Senator protested that for the last 10 years the executive branch has been fighting a secret war in Laos, using funds appropriated "largely without the knowledge—and therefore obviously without the consent

of either the Congress or the American people."

The Symington amendment still faces the possibility of being watered down or eliminated when the military procurement bill goes to a Senate-House conference later this week.